

ATLANTA

This Atlanta mainstay made its public debut on Christmas Day in 1929



By **Scott Flynn**, **WSBTv.com**



ATLANTA — It has been an Atlanta mainstay for the last 96 years and it was on Christmas Day 1929 that people across the metro got to hear the incredible sounds of Mighty Mo play for the first time at the Fox Theatre.

People lined up around the corner on a snowy Christmas Day for the grand opening of the Fox, just two months after the huge stock market crash that led to the Great Depression.

Atlantans saw the theater as an escape from worry about their futures.

As part of the celebration, Enrico Leide, a concert cellist and conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, led the Fox Grand Orchestra in “This Shrine of Beauty.”

Part of that orchestra was a tiny woman named Iris Vining Wilkins, who played the theatre’s iconic Mighty Mo organ for its very first performance for the public.

Constructed in the 1920s by M.P. Moller Pipe Organ Company, Mighty Mo is one of only five theater organs of its kind still in operation worldwide.

Atlantans have been treated to the organ’s mighty sounds for years before movies, concerts and shows at the midtown theatre.

RELATED STORIES:

- [**Fox Theatre collects prestigious preservation award**](#)
- [**Fox Theatre grant gives big boost to preserving Georgia’s historic Springer Opera House**](#)

The organ also plays a role in tales of the theatre’s supernatural history. Local legend has it that an old organist who used to play Mighty Mo in the theatre had his ashes scattered there after they died and is said to still linger behind.

Over the years, employees of the Fox have said they can hear him play his favorite tunes after hours.

In 2020, Mighty Mo underwent a rehabilitation project to correct temporary enhancements made in the 1970s that did not reflect original Moeller workmanship.

Upgrades were made to the organ’s internal control system which allowed for expanded capabilities.

The organ’s wiring was also up to code along with the console, so Mighty Mo met the American Guild of Organists’ specifications.

“This elaborate and time-consuming endeavor ultimately took months longer than anticipated due to its intricate complexities and the preservation team’s dedication to accuracy,” the Fox Theatre told **Channel 2 Action News**.

The cost for the restoration was just over \$500,000, but the years of play and enjoyment those enhancements continue to bring to this day remain priceless.

